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## CHAPTER 2

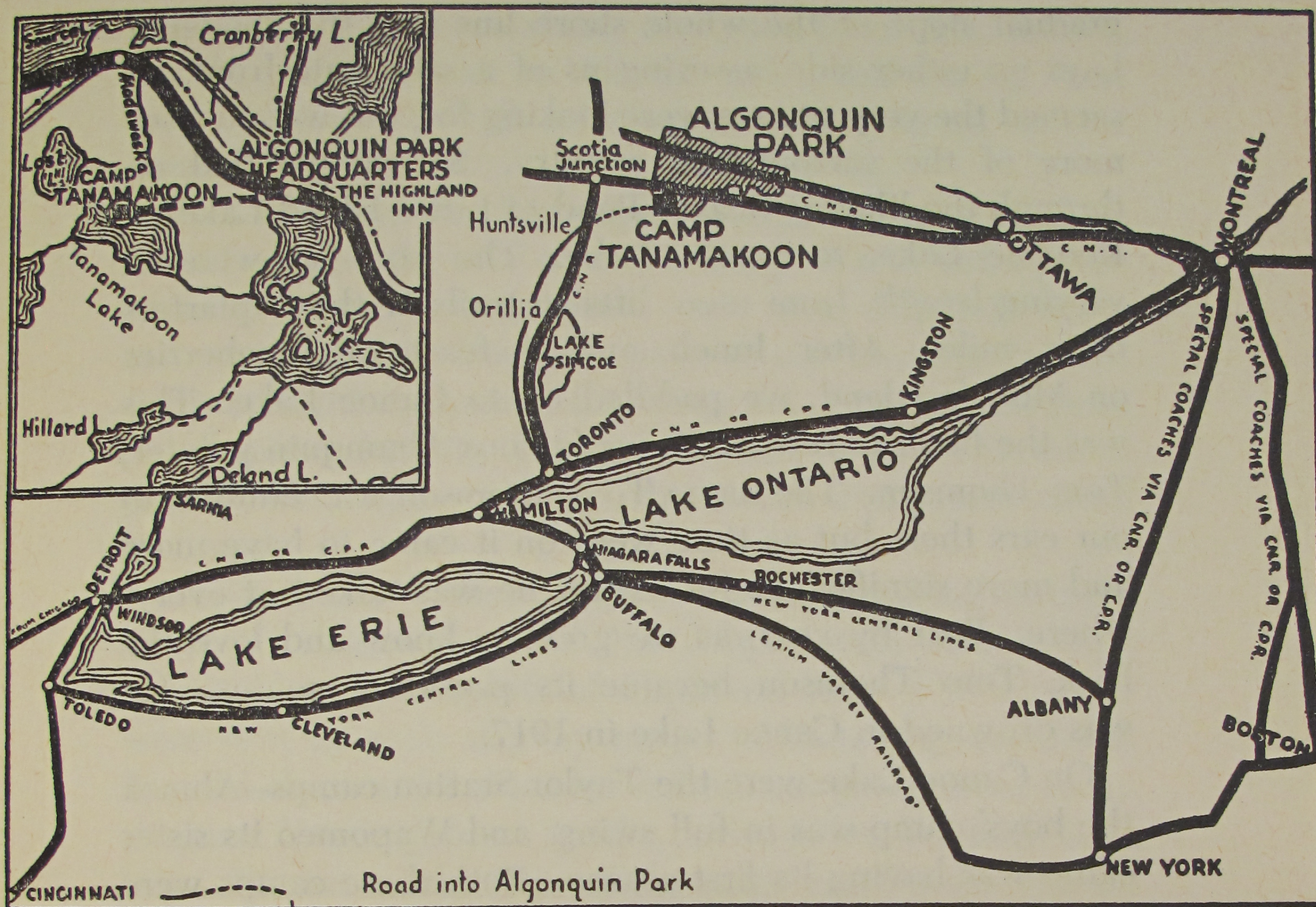
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### *The Search for a Site*

THE PARK is less than two hundred miles from Toronto by rail. On arrival we talked to Mr. Miller, the Superintendent, and other officials, and set out with an Indian guide. A paddle across Cache Lake and up the Madawaska River, lifting our canoes over beaver dams, brought us into Whites' Lake. There we spent the first day of our exploration trip, and there we sighted our first buck, still a vivid memory. Just as our canoe rounded the bend in the Madawaska Creek he stood at the water's edge, his head held high, his great antlers silhouetted against the foliage. He watched us for a moment or two, then a white tail flashed and he bounded into the woods and out of sight. Farther up the creek the beaver were at work building a dam. It was all utterly peaceful and awe-inspiring.

The next morning we went back alone to Whites' Lake, pitched our tent, and prepared to stay a few days. The Lake is about a mile from end to end and in shape is something like an hour glass. In the middle a promontory juts out and slopes down to two points, one facing the sunrise, the other the sunset. We camped on the latter. A fire had raged there some thirteen years before and the burnt





timber was still sprawled over the hillside; small evergreens were pushing their way through the destruction. To get the place cleared looked like the work of a lifetime, but all in all it seemed to offer great possibilities.

The area between the two points was high and dry. The site was remote, yet within easy distance of the Canadian National Railway station, Algonquin Park Headquarters and Highland Inn, hitherto outposts of civilization, all were close together overlooking Cache Lake. Highland Inn we thought would provide convenient accommodation for parents visiting our camp.

We explored the site of the old lumber camp which had been active thirty years before. It was clear of trees and comparatively level, perfect for a riding ring. The hilltop, when cleared of a windfall of trees, would provide ample space for a tennis court and a play field. We noted the



gradual slope of the whole shore line and the sheltered bays on either side, assuring us of a safe waterfront. It seemed the very site we were looking for, but we must see more of the surrounding country. So we paddled on through the lilies at Beaver Pond to Little Island Lake, to Koochie Lake, to Smoke Lake. The portages were of varying length, from mere lifts to trails of three quarters of a mile. After lunch and a feast of blueberries on Molly's Island, we paddled on to Canoe Lake. This was the favorite retreat of our famous Algonquin painter, Tom Thomson. The name Tom Thomson was familiar to our ears then, but as time went on it came to have more and more significance for us, for he was talked of everywhere. Year by year, as we grew to know and love the Park, Tom Thomson became its presiding genius. He was drowned in Canoe Lake in 1917.

On Canoe Lake were the Taylor Statten camps—Ahmek the boys' camp was in full swing, and Wapomeo its sister camp was having its first season. Both these camps were beautifully situated, Wapomeo on an island on the west side of the lake and Ahmek on the east side, about a mile away.

There were several other camps in the Park at that time. Northway Lodge, an American girls' camp on Cache Lake, established in 1906 by Miss Fannie Case of Rochester, was the oldest girls' camp on record in Canada. Pathfinder, an American boys' camp on Source Lake, had been established in 1914, and has been directed for many years by Mr. Herman J. Norton of Rochester. These two camps are still active. The other early camps of the Park were for boys, most of them run in conjunction with boys' schools in the United States. All have since been discontinued.

We spent the first night on Canoe Lake at the summer haunt of Tom Thomson, Mowat Lodge. One of the few hotels in the Park. A favourite place for visitors and



outstanding for its sociability and good food. The following day, after a visit to Ahmek and a sail during "rest hour" with our friends at Wapomeo, we started on our homeward trip.

This had been my first experience in carrying a canoe. I resolved that if I ever owned a camp no one but a guide accustomed to the task would carry one, definitely not a camper, and that I would make it my business to find featherweight equipment for the packs. For the next year, in whatever locality I found myself, I was constantly peering into shop windows where such equipment could be found.

The next move was to explore the surrounding country by land. Minnesing and Nominigan were two C.N.R. summer hotels, outposts of Highland Inn. The supplies were sent in each day by stage. Minnesing, on Burnt Island Lake, was fourteen miles from our prospective camp site, and Nominigan, on Smoke, seven miles. We took both trips. We sat on the floor of the stage and leaned against the bread boxes. The road was like nothing I had ever seen before. The stage was tossed from boulder to boulder, rocking and swaying from side to side, till one imagined it would lose a wheel or land in a ditch at any moment. We frequently climbed out and walked behind. Nevertheless, both roads were accessible from the site on Whites' Lake and would be excellent for riding. The Minnesing road had long stretches suitable for cantering and the tall pines through which we drove were magnificent.

Next we set out toward the eastern section of the Park, this time with a guide. There seemed infinite possibilities for canoe trips among the countless lakes and rivers. On the more popular routes, camp sites were already built and kept in repair by Park rangers. These sites consisted of a stone fireplace, a table, benches and a level clearing for a tent. Travellers in the Park were allowed to build fires only in the fireplaces provided.



The guide took us down the Madawaska to Lake of Two Rivers, Whitefish Lake, Rock Lake. We had hoped to include Opeongo, but much to our disappointment we did not get that far. Opeongo is the paradise of Algonquin, the largest lake in the Park. Perhaps it was the name Opeongo, or perhaps the memory of all the adventure stories we had heard, that intrigued us, but we had the secret hope all along that Opeongo might be the chosen spot for the camp, even though the Superintendent held out no hope of our being able to secure a lease. We returned to our original camping ground on Whites' Lake, and in comparison to anything we had seen it seemed so safe and protected and so suitable in every respect that we decided to take it if we could get it. Later, on a canoe trip to Opeongo, I realized that the Superintendent had been absolutely right. Opeongo, though beautiful, was much too large and too remote for a girls' camp.

We staked out a site for the main lodge, bespoke a man to do the clearing, and went back to the city to apply for a lease. At that time leases were granted for twenty-one years, and renewed if satisfactory to both parties. The line ran through the middle of the property — Canisbay township on one side, Peck on the other; but the shoreline had not been surveyed. That done, the lease was granted. Though there were only five acres, the site included the sunrise and sunset points, and as it turned out the extent made little difference, since we never quite knew where our property began or ended. As far as we were concerned, the whole twenty-seven hundred square miles of Algonquin Park was at our disposal, and there were no other leases on our lake. The authorities, both in the Park and in the Parliament Buildings, were co-operative though discouraging at first. Several other people had recently attempted to start camps in the Park, but owing to the remoteness and the difficulty of getting in supplies the



projects failed, and we were told of these failures wherever we went.

I talked things over with a friend who was a lawyer. He advocated forming an incorporated company, and drew up papers. This was the beginning of Tanamakoon. My assets were \$300.00 plus a lease on the land!

In the fall of 1924 a private Company was formed with part of the capital in redeemable preferred stock. As a business proposition it was looked on as a risky venture. Any who invested would do so because of a personal interest. The shares sold easily at first to my friends; in fact the financial problem seemed so simple that I turned my attention to other things that seemed more pressing. A foolish move, as it turned out. We took three plans to an architect who gave us an estimate; we chose the least expensive, and went ahead with the main building almost immediately.

I managed to get to the Park every other weekend. It was a different kind of journey from what it is today. There was no road then into Algonquin. There was a paved road to Orillia and from there on a dusty, winding dirt road, which we followed to Novar, where we spent the night at Travellers' Rest. In the morning we motored the remaining six miles to Scotia Junction, arriving in time to catch the 7:00 a.m. way-freight into the Park. Scotia Junction was at the intersection of the line going north from Toronto and the east-west line between Parry Sound and Ottawa. There was little in the place besides a country store, a primitive railway hotel, a railway station and a few frame houses. The benches and floor of the station served as beds for many a weary traveller awaiting train connections.

The only alternative to this route was to take the north-bound train from Toronto arriving at Scotia Junction at 1:25 a.m. and to spend the night at the hotel there until the train left in the morning.



The return trip, which involved catching the south-bound train at 3:35 a.m., was little better.

I can best describe the hotel by a remark of the father of one of our first-year campers, who said, "I sent my child to Tanamakoon because I figured that any woman who had the grit to take that trip and stay at that hotel had the grit to run a camp." However, I really regarded travelling on the way-freight as an adventure. We were always welcome in the caboose, and had dinner with the men, sometimes adding a pie to their meal of T-bone steak and potatoes.

By late fall the lodge had been roofed and was boarded up and left to be completed in the spring.

All this time we had been pondering on an appropriate name for the camp. Since it was in Algonquin Park an Indian name seemed inevitable. We collected two hundred possible names from various sources — the library, Pauline Johnson's family, Ernest Thompson Seton, Indian people, and authorities on Indian lore. The choice finally narrowed down to two: Tanamakoon or Dawandena. Tanamakoon is a salutation, meaning in the Indian tongue "Hail fellow, well met." Dawandena means "Dawn of day." Tanamakoon won out, and Dawandena was the name later given to the point facing the sunrise.

There were many other decisions involved in the establishing of a camp. A prospectus had to be drawn up, a camp outfit decided on, a staff engaged, and campers enrolled; but at this critical moment the affairs of Margaret Eaton School demanded my full attention.

Important changes were taking place there. Mrs. Nasmith had been the principal from the beginning. She was a dynamic personality, and her zeal to further the work in which she was so keenly interested was infectious. With a curriculum of dramatic art, literature, voice production, physical education and dancing, the school was



ahead of its time. It was unique and well known throughout Canada.

Too, under Mrs. Nasmith, the school became a cultural centre, and many artists were entertained there. I remember meeting Phyllis Neilsen Terry, Forbes Robertson, W. B. Yeats and various other celebrities of that day.

Now Mrs. Nasmith had resigned!

The school had stood on North Street, now part of Bay Street, just south of Bloor. It was of grey stone with imposing Greek pillars, modelled on the Pantheon. The widening of Bay Street necessitated the removal of the front of the building. We were moved to what was then known as the Margaret Eaton School Extension. The curriculum was reorganized under two separate departments: Dramatic Art, under Mr. Bertram Forsythe, and Physical Education, under my direction. A year later the Dramatic department was discontinued and we became a school of Physical Education exclusively, devoted to teacher training. I carried on as principal.

In the reorganization, counsellor training, among other subjects, had been added to the course. This was to take place at Tanamakoon in the month of September.

I question whether I could have carried both the school and the camp had it not been that at this critical point a friend came to my assistance. She was Freda Cole, a member of the French department of the University of Toronto. She had come to lunch one day and had seen the piled-up confusion on my desk. From that moment she undertook to share with me the joys and burdens of establishing a camp in the wilderness, and her faith in the project and her loyal support helped me to carry through those most difficult years. Whenever a need arose, whether for a fret-saw or a cook, she was ready with information about where either could be secured. I shall never cease to be grateful for the quality and generosity of her friendship. She died in 1942.



In the autumn of 1924, all we had to show for our efforts was a lease, a lodge with a roof, and a camp name. By early spring of 1925 much had been achieved. We had a prospectus, a camp outfit and a competent staff, and only awaited word that the ice had broken in Whites' Lake to proceed with the building.

We bought a seventeen-hand horse in order to get ahead with the clearing as well as the building. A stone mason was brought in from Novar to build the lodge fireplace, a massive structure which was to form the central place in camp for many years.

The lodge contained a kitchen, a dining-room and a large recreation room. The cabins were scattered on either side of it along the shore wherever there was open space, as we prized our trees and never wantonly cut them down.

Other buildings on the premises included the men's and maids' cabins, a washhouse, storeroom and office, a substantial dock with diving tower and springboards. That was all.

The waterfront equipment consisted of six canoes, one sailboat, two flat-bottomed boats, and a square-stern skiff with an outboard motor. A platform was put across the two flat-bottomed boats and this makeshift barge was used to bring in the freight — a stove, piano, beds, mattresses, tables, lumber. Looking back now, I find it hard to believe that our venture was launched with such primitive equipment.

Getting through the Madawaska River was tricky. The beaver dams over which we had had to portage our canoes in the earlier visits had by now been cut through, but there were still boulders to be dodged, and we rarely got through without breaking a few shear-pins.

The windfall of trees behind the lodge was cleared away and the ground levelled in readiness for a tennis court.



One weekend, just as the director walked into camp, the big horse, with one last effort, pulled an enormous boulder out of the tennis court. One of the men told of the struggle at the dinner table and added, "Just as the Boss came over the hill." The Boss! Did he mean me? I realized as never before the responsibility I had undertaken. It frightened me. Little did the man know that the poor Boss did not know where his next day's pay was coming from. It was not proving so easy to sell shares in the spring as it had been in the fall, and I had no money with which to carry on.

My faith in the idea had not been shaken, but my pride suffered. The J. D. Shier Company in Bracebridge were generously co-operative, and supplied lumber on deferred payment, but in my embarrassment I invariably ducked my head and drove through Bracebridge as quickly as possible, for it was a new experience to owe a penny I couldn't pay.

By July the cabins were set up, the storeroom filled, the staff on hand and an excellent cook installed. All was in readiness for the opening day.





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